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Shifting the Nationalist Narrative? Representing Cham and Champa in Vietnam's Museums and Heritage Sites

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Abstract

The Cham are commonly defined as an ethnic group associated with the ancient Southeast Asian kingdoms of Champa. Corresponding to present-day central and southern Vietnam, these kingdoms were progressively conquered by the Vietnamese Dai Viet Empire from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries. In offering a critical reading of Cham and Champa museum representations that goes against the grain of the standard Vietnamese nationalist narrative, the article does not advocate for the Cham to be inserted into a chronological counter-narrative of the Vietnamese nation. Rather, it contributes to literature exploring how museum exhibits can feature multiple perspectives on identity and belonging. Cham representations in Vietnam thus have broader significance for how ethnic minorities are depicted as part of an official national narrative. The article concludes that on the whole, juxtaposing representations of Cham ethnicity with Champa artefacts does not amount to a real engagement with the legacy of Champa for Vietnamese history and identity, though limited exceptions are discussed.

Key words: Cham, Champa, Vietnam, Museums, Nation, Heritage, Ethnicity

Introduction

The Cham are commonly defined as an ethnic group associated with the ancient Southeast Asian kingdoms of Champa. Corresponding to present-day central and southern Vietnam, these kingdoms were conquered by the Vietnamese Dai Viet Empire to the north from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries. Distinctive, brick-built temples testifying to Champa's sophisticated civilization remain dotted across southern Vietnam today. Cham people have been subjected to forced displacement across centuries, most recently in the late 1970s when many of those settled in Cambodia fled from the Khmer Rouge regime.

The nationalist narrative in the title refers to that of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, governed by the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) since the unification of 'North' and 'South' Vietnam in 1976. Vietnamese museums and heritage sites are part of the Ministry of Culture and Information's remit. Champa and the Cham ethnic group have been a sensitive issue for a national narrative that tends to conform to the classic model of *longue durée*. This emphasizes the longevity and continuity of the Vietnamese nation across two thousand years, which in turn serves to legitimate the current contours of the Vietnamese nation-state (Sutherland 2010). Yet this narrative of historic victimhood and Vietnamese unity against the Chinese, Mongols, French and Americans, which underpins the VCP's quest to maintain its legitimacy in a unified Vietnam, minimizes the Dai Viet Empire's progressive 'southward march' (*nam tiến*) from its centre in the Red River Delta towards the Mekong Delta, conquering territories controlled by the Champa and Khmer Empires in the process. To do so would highlight the marked cultural differences between northern, central and southern Vietnam and their distinct and distinctive historical antecedents, thereby undermining the official nationalist narrative. Representations of Cham and Champa are important, therefore, as an indicator of the extent to which the Vietnamese nationalist narrative - which tends anachronistically to project present-day Vietnam back through history - continues to influence museum interpretation at the expense of Cham voices (Sutherland 2010).

Taking the literature on how museums have perpetuated hegemonic nationalist narratives as a starting point (Sutherland 2010: 103-8), the article contributes to more recent literature exploring how museum exhibits can feature multiple perspectives on identity and belonging by incorporating voices from members of the communities concerned (Message 2006a; Montanari 2015; Sutherland 2016: 96-7). Examples of museums that have attempted this include the National Museum of Australia in Canberra, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington, St Fagan's National Museum of History in Wales, the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, England, and the Centre Culturel Tjibaou in New Caledonia, among many others (Message 2006b). Ethnic minority experts who can express their culture and history to the public contribute to creating shifts in museum exhibition narratives, and we find limited evidence of this regarding the Cham in Vietnam.

The Cham no longer have a homeland or a national 'geo-body' (Thongchai 1994; Mullaney 2012: 9) anchoring them to a specific place. The memory of Champa remains, however, as a past polity that gives rise to the unifying category of Cham. Representations of Champa and Cham in Vietnamese museums are often ahistorical, emphasizing timeless aesthetics or essentialized material culture. That is, Champa is usually represented through the fine art of an ancient kingdom which left beautiful sculptures, reliefs and temple complexes, while Cham people are represented as an ethnic minority through folkloric items including clothing, handicrafts and religious objects. Vietnamese museums tend to avoid making the discursive connection between the lost kingdoms of Champa and contemporary Cham ethnic minority people, since highlighting Champa's historical defeat against the Vietnamese might undermine national unity and solidarity. During fieldwork that took place between April 2017 and February 2018, however, we observed 'shifts' in the representation of Champa and Cham in museums and various historical sites that pointed to the connection between them as well as to the existing cultural foundations of Champa in central Vietnam.

Acknowledging southern Vietnam's Champa past could be seen as breaking with long-standing nationalist historiography of Vietnamese unity and continuity, which has tended to underplay the Dai Viet Empire's history of southward conquest from the Red River Delta that progressively swallowed up the Champa kingdoms. At the same time, new interpretations of Cham heritage could be seen as recreating historical continuity in a different guise by establishing a direct link between relics of past Champa kingdoms and an ethnic minority population. These developments do not constitute a significant shift in the dominant Vietnamese national narrative as represented in Vietnam's museums and heritage sector, even though we document instances where Cham voices are being heard. This is because there is limited evidence of any bridging narrative between the Champa past and the Cham present in the sites we surveyed. Juxtaposing the Champa past with the Cham in the present rarely addresses or explains the intervening centuries, or how the descendants of those who built Champa temples became ethnic minorities in a Vietnamese state. That is, Cham ethnic minority status is not explicitly placed in the historical context of the conquest and eventual disappearance of Champa kingdoms. Instead, we tend to see the commodification of Cham arts and crafts, from handloom weaving to the largely invented Apsara dances, or decontextualized depictions of Cham festivals and rituals exhibited alongside Champa sites, without any explicit integration of the two. The recently opened exhibition at Da Nang's Cham Sculpture Museum and the Cham Cultural and Cultural Research Centres are exceptions, with the latter two constituting emic representations of Cham culture. Nonetheless, Champa heritage has long been controlled by the Vietnamese authorities and Cham people still have a limited say in its interpretation. Their increasing visibility in representing their culture and Champa heritage might enable more open discussion of the role and influence of Champa in Vietnam's national history, particularly that of central and southern Vietnam. For example, an ethnic Vietnamese tour guide at the Da Nang Cham Sculpture museum was overheard explaining to a group of Japanese tourists that central Vietnam used to belong to the Cham people, that the ethnic Vietnamese came later and learned how to live there from the Cham. This guide's openness and frankness hints that the Vietnamese national narrative is not unquestionable, and shifts may continue.

The first part of the article discusses the Champa and Cham-related exhibitions in major national museums. The second part discusses the relatively new presence of the Cham ethnic group in Champa heritage sites, and the final part discusses possible 'shifts' observed

in museum discourse, covering Vietnamese museums with significant Cham collections in Hanoi, Hue, Da Nang, Phan Rang, Phan Ri, An Giang and Ho Chi Minh City. Cham temple sites with museums attached - Po Nagar, Po Klong Garai and My Son - are also included (Po Rome's museum was newly built but still empty at the time of visiting). Initial fieldwork was followed with a visit to Hue in December 2017 and a return visit to Danang in February 2018, in order to include the newly opened exhibition at the Cham sculpture museum there. We drew on respective backgrounds in Cham studies (Nakamura 2012) and Vietnamese nation-building (Sutherland 2005, 2010, 2014) to interrogate the exhibits, the stories they told and the things they left unsaid, supplementing this with insights gained from conversations with Cham informants, including Cham tour guides and a Cham weaver at Champa sites, as well as Cham and Vietnamese museum directors with responsibility for Cham and Champa-related exhibitions. We drew on these conversations to help illuminate the exhibitions' origins and strategies, but our principal analytical focus was on identifying similarities and differences in material content, spatial layout and commentary among the exhibitions and with the historical record.

Dominant representations of Champa and Cham in Vietnamese museums

The history of Champa has been a sensitive matter in Vietnamese national discourse, in a way that directly mirrors the representation of Cham in Vietnamese museums. Bruce Lockhart's (2011) study of the historiography of Champa explains the different ways in which Vietnamese scholars have approached this topic since the 1950s. Studies published between 1950 and 1960 mentioned Vietnamese aggressiveness towards Champa and were rather sympathetic towards Champa's loss of its territories due to their criticism of the Vietnamese feudal system, but the fall of Champa was still described as 'becoming a part of the "great national family [of Dai Viet]"' (Lockhart 2011: 17). In studies published between 1960 and 1970, Vietnamese military campaigns against Champa were often omitted. Studies published in the 1980s mentioned Vietnamese southern expansion and the annexation of Champa territories, yet the occupation of Champa land was described as a result of self-defence needs or peaceful extensions of Dai Viet national territory. Recent studies have discussed the absorption of Champa by the Vietnamese more openly, but still in similar terms; colonization is depicted as migration, annexation as coexistence, and assimilation as cultural exchange between two ethnic groups, with an emphasis on the Viet-Cham hybrid culture of central Vietnam (Lockhart 2011: 16-22). This may be one contributing factor to the few shifts that have appeared in the dominant national discourse, as represented in Vietnamese museums.

Vietnamese museums make few links between Champa's magnificent historical heritage and contemporary Cham society. Champa is usually represented as an ancient kingdom, which left beautiful sculptures, reliefs and temple complexes. Its artistic achievements and sophistication are highlighted, but its history is rarely explained. Champa's sculptures are categorized according to their artistic style, such as the Tra Kieu style or the Tap Man style, and not according to dynasties. This contrasts with the widespread categorization of Vietnamese history in museums and school textbooks according to imperial dynasties (Sutherland 2010). The socio-political backgrounds and influences that characterize a particular artistic style, such as links to India or the Khmer Empire, are generally not explained. Neither are the Cham represented as the descendants of Champa, or as an ethnic group alongside artefacts from Champa. Instead, contemporary Cham culture is shown in ethnographic exhibitions as that of one of Vietnam's fifty-four official ethnic groups.

Previous research found that the national history museums in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City did not engage with Champa as part of their national narrative (Sutherland 2010: 125), and that remained the case in 2017. As with the rest of the permanent exhibition, the Champa displays have changed little over a decade. The National History Museum in Hanoi is still organized chronologically according to Dai Viet's imperial dynasties, and the Champa civilization is presented separately in aesthetic and not historical terms. The sole information panel introduces selected examples of Champa sculpture dating from the 7th-13th centuries 'in order to help visitors better understand the famous ancient Champa artistic culture'. In the Vietnamese language text, this is placed within the cultural and artistic diversity of Vietnam as a

community of ethnic minorities (better rendered in French than in the English translation). The Champa past and the Cham ethnic minority in the present are thereby discursively linked, but none of the historical detail is filled in and no Cham are given a voice in interpreting the past.

The Hanoi National Museum's Champa exhibit now features two panels sketching typical motifs in Champa architecture as well as a case of fourteenth and fifteenth century silver jewellery found in the Hai Van pass near the central Vietnamese city of Da Nang. This case of beautifully decorated personal effects, unique among the museums visited, creates a sense of immediacy, bringing Champa's inhabitants closer to the visitor as a historically evolving people rather than an essentialized ethnic minority. The only comparable display of material culture, though much less intimate, is a small selection of ceramic pots and dishes in the Ho Chi Minh History Museum. These pots feature alongside a large collection of Buddhist bronzes, artfully displayed across an entire museum wing devoted to Champa. The presentation here also remains resolutely aesthetic, however, and the introductory panel reveals very little about Cham history. Rather, the museum in Ho Chi Minh City situates the quality of its collection of Champa art within *Vietnam's* cultural heritage, before noting that the lost history of Champa has been reconstituted from a number of sources. Details of this history are notably absent beyond a reference to the Champa kingdoms' emergence in the context of Indian and Southeast Asian commerce, and their heyday 'during the first centuries of the Christian era.' The panel ends by stating the significance of Buddhist and Hindu sculpture and temples, with no mention of the decline, fall or legacy of Champa kingdoms.

In another room, the museum displays an ethnographic collection of costumes and other material culture that includes the Cham. This is completely divorced from any contextualization other than the mapping of ethnic minorities across southern Vietnam. There is no historicization of any of these groups, let alone incorporation into the museum's national narrative. Neither spatial proximity nor explicit commentary suggests a link between the Cham artefacts in this room and those on Champa's art. No shifts are apparent here in the dominant narrative of Vietnamese history as represented in Vietnam's two flagship history museums in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Significant space is devoted to Champa sculpture, which is praised in panels as being of great aesthetic merit and a valued part of 'Vietnam's cultural heritage,' but the history of Champa does not feature. Neither does its important role in the progressive expansion of Dai Viet, which in turn helps to explain the extent of Vietnam's sovereign territory today. The connection between the Champa past and today's Cham ethnic minorities is not made explicit or explored and neither they, nor any other featured ethnic minority, are given a voice.

In April 2017 the Hanoi National Museum showcased eighteen, officially designated national treasures in its entrance foyer, including a stone Champa stele known as the Vo Canh Stele after the village in central Vietnam where it was found. This could constitute a shift in the Vietnamese historical narrative to the extent that it refers to a Champa kingdom and elevates a piece of Champa sculpture to the status of Vietnamese national treasure. Its framing, however, suggests that its significance lies in showing how Buddhism first penetrated into Southeast Asia, and thence into Vietnamese history and culture, rather than in evidencing Champa's contribution to that history and culture. Therefore, this exhibit does not contradict our conclusion that there is no fundamental shift in dominant Vietnamese museum narratives regarding Champa.

The Vietnamese Museum of Ethnology in Hanoi follows the dominant categorization of Vietnam's ethnic groups into fifty-three minorities and the majority *Kinh*, or ethnic Vietnamese, with which the exhibition begins. The section devoted to the Cham is near the end of the route, grouped together on the first floor with ethnic Khmer and ethnic Chinese (known as *Hoa*). This spatial organization does not correspond to the ethnolinguistic categorization presented at the museum entrance, however, where the Cham are introduced among Austronesian peoples living across Southeast Asia, some of whom 'created nations, such as Champa, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines'. Two large maps of Vietnam and Southeast Asia depict the language families, the Vietnamese map subdividing highland Austronesians from the lowland Cham as a separate category. This approach to categorizing Vietnam's ethnic diversity is long-established (Pelley 1998); a much older version of this exhibit, featuring black and white photographs, remains on display in the ethnographic section of Ho Chi Minh National History Museum. Nevertheless, the museum exhibition ends with a grouping of Cham, Hoa and Khmer,

three lowland ethnic groups from three different ethnolinguistic families. A dividing wall across the exhibition floor spatially distinguishes these lowland groups from highland Austronesians, thereby separating the Cham from the rest of the Austronesian language family. The museum provides no explicit reason for this spatial organization. However, a clue can be found in the conclusion to the panel introducing the section on the Khmer, which states that 'the historical communities of the Khmer, Viet, Hoa, and Cham have created a unique cultural heritage in southern Vietnam.'

Apart from all being lowland groups, one further element that unites the Cham, Khmer and ethnic Chinese Hoa is their association with independent countries or kingdoms, past or present. Indeed, part of the museum's English-language panel on the Cham has one of the most extensive overviews of Cham history we found, and is worth quoting in full:

The Cham have a long history in the coastal deltas of central Vietnam. In the late second century, they founded the kingdom of Champa that achieved a brilliant culture. They also formerly had a naval fleet for war and for trade. With the influence of the Indian culture, Cham society was highly stratified. They were defeated by the Viet in the 15th century.

The French translation follows this content very closely, with an additional reference to conflict between Champa and the 'kingdom of Angkor'. This broader historical contextualization does not feature in the Vietnamese language version, however, and so the reference to the Vietnamese defeat of the Cham is not conveyed to Vietnamese-speaking visitors.

At a museum of ethnology, a focus on everyday life rather than history is to be expected. Curators are also likely to cater to presumed differences in Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese general knowledge of the Cham. It is striking, nevertheless, that translations of the introductory panels on the Hoa and the Khmer correspond much more closely to each other across all three languages. This suggests that the statement of Cham defeat by the Viet has been deemed either unsuitable or unnecessary for presentation to Vietnamese audiences, in a form of 'translation shift' that has been documented in other Asian museums (Chen and Liao 2017: 61). To the extent that this panel presents the Vietnamese as a conquering force rather than the victim of repeated foreign invasion, it may be deemed an undesirable deviation from the dominant national narrative. It is in marked contrast to descriptions of conquered Champa lands as deserted (*hoang*) in Vietnamese school textbooks of the 2000s, for example (Sutherland 2010: 149), and so it is unclear whether Vietnamese visitors are likely to be aware of this conquest and its implications.

Little further context or evidence support the historic links made in the text and Cham voices are not explicitly included in the exhibit or its interpretation. However, according to Pham Van Duong - now the Museum of Ethnology's deputy director - the Cham exhibits were collected in the 1990s from Cham communities whose members were also employed to rebuild a Cham house in the museum grounds.¹ For example, an information panel traces Cham weaving techniques back to before the twelfth century and links contemporary pottery for domestic use to ceramics decorating 'ancient towers and temples.' Religious diversity among Cham is connected to Indian Brahmanism and a form of Islam from Indonesia and Malaysia, thereby placing 'the society and spiritual life of the Cham' at the confluence of several cultures. The most imposing display, which also features in the exhibition space at Po Klong Garai, is a large, buffalo-drawn cart filled with earthenware pots next to two faceless mannequins in traditional costume. The cart dates from 1956 and was brought to the museum forty years later for the museum opening in 1997, but the display lacks any detailed explanation or interpretation and Pham Van Duong confirmed that the Cham exhibit had not been revisited since it was installed.²

As Pham Van Duong also noted, the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology is concerned with everyday life whereas art and history museums highlight other aspects of Cham(pa) civilization. It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that it offers a more complete introduction to Champa - for non-Vietnamese speakers - than either of Vietnam's two national history museums. Unlike those museums, Hanoi's Museum of Ethnology does not follow a historical chronology of Vietnam and thus has more freedom of interpretation, but its display reflects ambivalence about where the Cham 'fit in' historically and geographically. Although it addresses Cham religious diversity, for example, uninitiated visitors may still struggle to distinguish between communities living

in central Vietnam and the Mekong Delta when film footage of both is spliced together in a video montage. The inconsistency in presenting the Cham as part of a particular ethnolinguistic family according to Vietnam's official categorization of ethnic minorities, but then alongside the Khmer and the Hoa as key contributors to the 'cultural heritage of southern Vietnam' departs from the Vietnamese national narrative to some extent. Singling out southern Vietnamese culture as distinct could thus be considered a 'shift,' but does not explicitly address different ways of being Cham using Cham voices.

Most of the museums which hold a Cham folklore collection exhibit the culture of Cham living in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan provinces in Central Vietnam. Material culture collected from Cham in the Mekong Delta tends to be minimal, but An Giang Museum, one of the provincial museums in the region, holds the largest collection of Mekong Delta Cham cultural items. Here, the Cham are treated as a local ethnic minority group living in the province alongside other ethnic minorities, namely Khmer and Hoa. In contrast to Hanoi's Ethnology Museum, which treats the ethnic Vietnamese *Kinh* as one of the fifty-four national ethnic groups, An Giang Museum displays *Kinh* cultural items in the section entitled 'Kinh ethnic group culture (*Van Hoa Dan Toc Kinh*).' This is comparable in size and prominence to the section on Oc Eo Culture (*Van Hoa Oc Eo*), a pre-Angkor civilization found in the lower Mekong region. Indeed, An Giang Museum's highlight is a large collection of archaeological troves from Oc Eo culture. The exhibitions of these two cultures are marked by gated entrances and occupy much more space than the exhibitions on Cham, Hoa and Khmer, which are simply indicated as ethnic groups (*Dan Toc Cham*, *Dan Toc Khmer* and *Dan Toc Hoa*.) An Giang Museum's ethnic minority exhibition demonstrates the conventional representation of minority people in Vietnam as ahistorical. There is no explanation of the Chinese dynasties to contextualize Hoa people, Angkor to show the origins of Khmer people and Champa to situate Cham people. Instead, the artefacts are organized to show economic their activities, customs, traditions and religion in terms of material culture.

In contrast to the majority of Cham in south-central Vietnam, Cham from the Mekong Delta follow Sunni Islam and speak a similar dialect to Cham living in Cambodia, who are also Sunni Muslims. The Cham population in Cambodia and the Mekong Delta region live there as a result of centuries of Cham forced displacement due to Vietnamese attacks on Champa. However, the historical background as to why Cham people came to settle in An Giang province is not mentioned in the museum. There is no explanation of the relationship between the Cham people in An Giang province and those living in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan, or the historical migration of Cham. Likewise, there are no cultural items linking the Mekong Delta Cham to those in south-central Vietnam. The only exception is a picture of young Cham Muslim women performing the 'Apsara dance', which, as we discuss in a later section, is of relatively recent vintage. This picture seems to indicate that the Apsara dance as an 'invented tradition' has been made an ethnic marker of the Cham people in Vietnam (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). It may connect the Cham people to Champa, but it also works as an ethnic marker equivalent to clothing, ritual objects and so on. This suggests, once again, that this museum conforms to the dominant national narrative in Vietnam which presents the Cham as one of fifty-four official ethnic groups but does not connect them to the historical legacy of Champa. Rather, they remain largely essentialized in terms of (invented) folkloric tradition.

This section concludes that dominant representations of Champa and Cham people in Vietnamese museums are ahistorical. Champa's artistic achievements are highlighted but the political context that made such achievements possible is not mentioned. The disappearance of Champa is hardly ever mentioned. Overall, the Cham are depicted as an ethnic minority group with a colourful and exotic culture, and their past connection with Champa is rarely explained.

Representation of Cham and Champa history in Champa heritage sites

In recent years there has been an increased tendency for Champa heritage sites to be explicitly associated with the Cham ethnic minority. At first sight, this appears to highlight an aspect of Vietnam's past that falls outside the dominant official narrative of Vietnamese national unity and longevity, as exemplified in the previous section. This may be seen as evidence of a greater openness on the part of Vietnam's Ministry of Culture, which controls most heritage sites, but

appearances can be deceptive. We argue that the representation and thus official recognition of contemporary Cham identity and culture at Champa sites should not be over-interpreted as an official reckoning with, reassessment of or challenge to official Vietnamese narratives of the past (Sutherland 2016). On the contrary, it can often entrench Cham(pa) culture as that of either a picturesque minority or an aesthetically sophisticated, vanished civilization. For example, the 'Apsara dance', formerly called the Siva dance or a classical dance, has become a popular cultural representation of the Cham people. It is considered to be part of an ancient dance tradition, but was actually recreated by a Vietnamese artist called Dang Hung in the mid-1990s based on contemporary Cham folk dances and dancing figures found on old reliefs and ancient sculptures (Dang Hung 1998: 15). It has become quite popular and is performed at international conferences and in restaurants, as well as at major tourist attractions such as My Son and Da Nang's Cham Sculpture Museum. As such, the Cham Apsara dance has become a mere genre, style, or taste within the gamut of Vietnamese theatrical performance. In other words, it is removed from the experience of Cham people, whose history and socio-political situation are never mentioned in the context of its performance (Nakamura 2012: 9-12). Many Champa heritage sites seem to have been commodified in a comparable way.

Many tourists visit the Champa temples of Po Nagar due to their immediate proximity to the popular beach resort of Nha Trang in southern Vietnam. Our visit coincided with a private Cham ritual taking place there. Members of a Cham dance troupe, wearing matching costumes, played and performed for tourists on one side of an esplanade before joining their families to play and dance for ritual purposes. Their offerings - trays laden with fruit, rice, chicken, assorted beverages and cigarettes - resembled those depicted in a photograph featured in a small exhibition located at the back of the temple complex, next to retail outlets. Alongside assorted statuary and images of archaeological sites, this contained a selection of photographs depicting both Cham and ethnic Vietnamese religious ceremonies. In one of these, an elderly woman and man wearing Vietnamese and Cham traditional costumes, respectively, together hold up the national certificate of intangible cultural heritage awarded to the 'Tháp Bà (Po Nagar)' festival. As the brackets used on the original certificate suggest, this site is now as much a place of ethnic Vietnamese as Cham pilgrimage and worship. At Po Nagar, clothing used in the Vietnamese cult of mother goddesses has been placed on the original Cham statue of a goddess called Bhagavati, and we witnessed many ethnic Vietnamese worshipping there. Other than this image, however, the exhibition space at Po Nagar offers no contextualization or explanation as to why, when or by whom the temples were built. Neither does it explicitly distinguish between its different significance and use by ethnic Vietnamese and Cham worshippers. Nor does it give a voice to Cham who evidently continue to attach strong ritual significance to the site. This trend is repeated elsewhere.

Po Klong Garai temple, which is situated on the outskirts of Phan Rang in southern Vietnam, features a much larger, purpose-built exhibition space next to a wide array of souvenir stalls. The exhibition is very different to the one at Po Nagar in that it highlights aspects of Cham spiritual life, principally through images and costumes. Photographs show worshippers streaming towards Po Klong Garai during the Chams' annual Kate festival, for example, but labelling is minimal and there are no interpretive panels. It is not possible, therefore, for an uninitiated visitor to learn about continuity and change between the Champa past and the present Cham from the exhibition displays, nor about the wider context and significance of the rituals depicted. This fits with the tendency for souvenirs and tourist entertainment to feature colourful, attractive representations of Cham culture, without explaining the significance of the Cham to the site itself. My Son is another example of this, where Cham showcase weaving on a traditional loom and dancing next to the central temple complex, but their activities are not explicitly built into the site's interpretation.

Probably the most famous Champa temple complex, the museum interpretation at the My Son site neither inserts Champa into Vietnamese historiography, nor clearly situates the temples and their significance within a history of Champa. Rather, it focuses on Champa archaeology and My Son's status as a UNESCO world heritage site. The panels surrounding the temples describe the specific function of each, but provide no broader historical or cultural context. This is not remedied in the displays of Cham weaving and dancing that provide a colourful spectacle for tourist consumption. The museum itself is easily bypassed by tourists

keen to climb straight onto the open minibuses that ply the route to the archaeological site located further down the valley. The museum's introductory panel points out that 'My Son contains evidence of cultural interactions between Champa and Dai Viet as well as with other ancient neighbouring states in Southeast Asia and great civilizations like India and China'. However, these cultural interactions are not elaborated upon in the exhibits, and it is difficult to discern from them any coherent narrative connecting the disparate elements that make up the My Son heritage site. The appearance of Cham people in Champa historical sites can be seen as a superficial shift in national discourse yet it also signals the commodification of ethnic minority culture. A partial exception to this is embodied in the Cham guide, an employee of the Ministry of Culture and Information, who explained the significance of Po Klong Garai to a group of Vietnamese tourists during our visit. This Cham voice is one sign of a possible shift, further evidence of which we discuss in the next section.

Possible shifts in the treatment of Champa and Cham in national discourse

Some examples have very recently emerged of Champa being discussed in the context of Vietnamese history and explicitly associated with the Cham ethnic minority. The Royal Antiquities Museum in the central Vietnamese city of Hue opened a new Champa exhibition in 2016. Hue is the former capital of the Vietnamese Nguyen dynasty (1804-1945) and is both a significant national heritage site and a UNESCO world heritage site. The Champa exhibition hall was thus opened in the heart of a Vietnamese cultural capital. Though the exhibition is relatively small,



visitors are welcomed by a stunning statue of a male deity, one of the masterpieces of Champa sculpture (see Figure 1). The collection came from around Hue and other places during the French colonial period and was exhibited soon after the museum was established in 1923. After 1945, this 'Séction des Cham' was closed throughout the Vietnam-American war years. In the early 2000s there was an attempt to reopen it, but the collection was not yet considered suitable for a museum which holds the Vietnamese Nguyen dynasty's treasures. Finally, a new director pushed through the bureaucratic difficulties and recreated the exhibition in 2016.³

An exhibition of Champa sculpture in Hue's Royal Antiquities Museum today can be interpreted as recognizing that Cham lived in Hue before it became part of Vietnamese territory and history. The city of Hue was built on what were formerly Cham lands that are sedimented under and built into Vietnamese culture. In

Figure 1: Male deity sculpture in the Cham exhibition hall, Royal Antiquities Museum, Hue

other words, the culture of Champa is an undercurrent of the culture of central Vietnam. Hue, as the capital of the Vietnamese dynasty which put an end to the last Champa kingdom's political independence in 1832, has no monuments or indications of this, or of the region's own history as part of Champa. Even though the museum exhibition does not discuss any of these political developments or Champa's conflicts with Hue's Nguyen dynasty, displaying outstanding examples of Champa's artistic achievements right next to the Nguyen dynasty's royal treasures does recall Champa's prior existence in the region. Having the 'S ction des Cham' in Hue's Royal Antiquities Museum can thus be interpreted as a possible shift in Vietnam's official national discourse. A more explicit shift can be discerned in another museum in Central Vietnam.



Figure 2: The Cham folklore section at the Cham sculpture museum in Da Nang

The Cham Sculpture Museum in the city of Da Nang, located around 90 km south of Hue, holds the largest single collection of Champa artefacts in Vietnam. Built in 1915 by the French and opened as a museum the following year, it was affiliated to the Provincial General Museum of Quang Nam - Da Nang after 1975 and re-established as an independent museum in 2007. The Museum went through several renovations and refurbishments in 1936, 2002, 2009 and most recently in 2016-2017, when it added a narrative on the continuity of Cham culture in both the Vietnamese and Southeast Asian cultural context. It now includes new galleries on Sa Huynh - Champa pottery and the festivals and handicrafts of contemporary Cham communities in Ninh Thuan province (Vo Van Thang 2018: 12-17). The Sa Huynh culture flourished between 1000 BCE and 200 CE along the central coast of Vietnam and is named after the location of the first archaeological site. Sa Huynh culture is considered the predecessor of Champa. The people of Sa Huynh cremated their dead and their burial jars are well known. Imported items such as carnelian and agate beads indicate that they had extensive trade networks.

A large space on the second floor of the Da Nang museum is dedicated to exhibiting Cham weaving and pottery, musical instruments and ritual practitioners' and musicians' clothing (see Figure 2). Various Cham festivals are explained on panels with pictures. Though the



Figure 3: Siva statue at the entrance of the Cham Cultural Centre in Binh Thuan

exhibition does not include the history of how the Cham people became an ethnic minority in Vietnam, the exhibition clearly indicates that there are people who inherited Champa's culture in the contemporary world and that they are not a forgotten historical group. Da Nang Museum of Cham Sculpture's newly renovated exhibition is thus revolutionary in connecting historical Champa to contemporary Cham. According to staff, the number of visitors to the museum was around 200,000 in 2013 and reached 300,000 in 2017, the vast majority of whom are foreign. As a museum that features on many tourist itineraries, it represents the largest shift we found in the Vietnamese national narrative. It also featured contemporary art by the Cham artist Dang Nang Tho in a recent exhibition, thereby providing a platform for a Cham voice to be heard.

Prior to the opening of Da Nang Cham Sculpture Museum's new folklore exhibition, there were already a few local museums in southern Vietnam which exhibited historical Champa artifacts and Cham ethnological materials

together. One such is the Cham Cultural Centre in Binh Thuan province, which opened in 2010. Another is the Cham Cultural Research Centre in neighbouring Ninh Thuan province. Both are located in the former territory of Champa called Panduranga and in the Vietnamese provinces with the highest concentration of Cham inhabitants today. They are emic compared to the Da Nang Museum of Cham Sculpture. That is, their exhibitions convey the voice of Cham people who are explaining their own culture to outsiders in ways that are strikingly different to the exhibitions discussed above.

The buildings of these two centres are modelled on Champa temples. A statue of Siva is situated at the entrance of the Cham Cultural Centre, evoking Champa temples where a priest greets the deity by throwing water towards the figure of Siva when they open for rituals (see Figure 3). By having a Siva statue at the entrance, the Cultural Centre is also following the sequence of Cham traditional rituals. The explanations of the exhibition items in the Cultural Centre are written in Cham, Vietnamese and English. Ritual items and pictures of priests conducting ceremonies show how Champa's religious tradition continues to be practised among contemporary Cham. Further, the display features a picture of a woman of Cham royal descent, considered the heir to the last Champa kingdom of Panduranga. It also includes photographs of contemporary Cham, including Cham students leaving school, Cham television presenters and Cham surgeons. This serves to connect ancient Champa to the modern Cham people.

The Cultural Centre exhibits a set of Hindu yoni and linga as its centrepiece, which is a replica of the interior of Po Klong Garai temple. The set is covered by a wooden structure and a sacred cow, Nandin, facing towards the linga and yoni. The statue of Nandin is not attributed much artistic value in this exhibition; its ritual function is stressed instead. This

contrasts with the aesthetic representations of Cham and Champa in Vietnamese museums discussed in the first section. The Cultural Centre also exhibits old Cham scripts written on palm leaves, rice paper, and modern paper to show the historical development of the Cham writing system. This exhibition demonstrates how the Cham writing tradition is still preserved and used in contemporary Cham society. Indeed, the main theme of both the Cham Cultural Centre in Binh Thuan and the Cham Cultural Research Centre in Ninh Thuan is the continuity of Cham culture and tradition from ancient Champa.

The Cham Cultural Research Centre was established in 1993. Management positions were held by ethnic Vietnamese (*Kinh*), who were not active in Cham research and did not produce publications of research outcomes. When the above-mentioned Cham artist Dang Nang Tho became director in 2004, however, the Research Centre organised a new exhibition hall and actively involved young Cham scholars in research. The Research Centre exhibits Sa Huynh and Champa archaeological materials on the first floor and Cham material culture on the second floor. The latter exhibition features a black and white photograph of the original Cham Cultural Research Centre established by a French Catholic priest, Father Gérard Moussay, who published a Cham-Vietnamese-French dictionary in 1971 under the Republic of Vietnam (a.k.a. South Vietnam). This is not openly discussed because of its association with the defunct Republic, but Father Moussay remains respected by Cham people as a patron of Cham culture who genuinely loved, understood and sought to protect it. Having this picture on display in the exhibition hall was unthinkable when the Research Centre was headed by an ethnic Vietnamese director because it draws attention to the Centre's 'politically incorrect' origins. Any information concerning the pre-1975 activities of the Cham community is still carefully monitored by Vietnamese authorities. For instance, it is extremely difficult to obtain information from national archives about Cham people's activities before 1975, especially those indicating a relationship with Westerners, without arousing suspicion of a possible connection to the ethnic independence movement known as FULRO (*Front Unifié de Lutte des Races Opprimées*). The Vietnamese government often criticises FULRO as a foreign-supported, counter-revolutionary insurgency which threatens national unity (Ngon Vinh 1982). Displaying the picture of the pre-1975 Cham Cultural Research Centre indicates Cham people's understanding of its beginnings. For them, the Research Centre is not a post-1975 establishment.

The exhibitions at these two centres could convey Cham people's perspectives because Cham people have been involved in their development. The Department of Culture and Information in Binh Thuan province had Cham officers working at management level and the Cham Cultural Research Centre was headed by a Cham. Our visit to the Cham Cultural Research Centre was guided by a young Cham researcher who explained the exhibition in English. This differs from current trends in the Vietnamese promotion of Cham culture in that Cham people are at the forefront of this demonstration of their culture. By reclaiming their agency in this way, Cham are taking ownership of their culture and contributing to shifts in dominant Vietnamese national narratives. These cultural centres receive few visitors, however, compared to the best-known Champa temple sites. The appearance of Cham in the context of Champa and Champa in the context of Vietnamese history suggests possible shifts in the national discourse, though perhaps these were intended to meet tourists' needs. The more Cham researchers and curators can be involved in presenting their culture and history in Vietnam's museums, the more substantial shifts can be made in the national narrative.

Conclusion

Scholars have long highlighted the anachronisms and homogenizing chronotopes inherent in nationalist historiography (Taylor 1998; Chatterjee 2005). In offering a critical reading of Cham and Champa museum representations that goes against the grain of the standard Vietnamese nationalist narrative, we do not advocate for the Cham to be inserted into a linear, chronological counter-narrative of the Vietnamese nation or any other 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991). Simply bridging the gap between the Champa past and present in this way might trouble some underlying assumptions of unity and longevity, but does nothing to disrupt 'history's linear temporality' (Kumarakulasingham 2016: 52) and the dominant role this continues to play in museum exhibits (Robert 2014: 26). On the whole, simply juxtaposing representations of

Cham ethnicity with Champa artefacts does not amount to a real engagement with the legacy of Champa for Vietnamese history and identity, nor does it give the Cham a strong voice in articulating their own history. Rather, we searched for evidence of emic Cham representations that exploited the potential for museums to depict alternatives to the norm.

Cham representations in Vietnam have broader significance for how ethnic minorities are depicted (or not) in museums, as part of an official national narrative (Gil 2016; Swensen 2017). How to integrate ethnic minority groups into the national narrative is a problematic issue, not only in Vietnam but throughout the world, since it often invokes dark historical events such as invasions, colonization and genocide. One way to address this is by organizing ahistorical exhibitions of minority culture that are silent about the past. For example, exhibitions of Native American culture have frequently been criticized for doing just that (Message 2006a: 2). Another is for museums and the communities being represented to enter into dialogue around repatriation and reciprocity concerning - often sacred - artefacts, such as between Māori and New Zealand museums (Cameron and McCarthy 2015, 3). As shown in the contributions to a 2015 special issue of *Museum and Society* entitled 'Museum, Field, Colony: Collecting, displaying and governing people and things,' the influence of anthropological ordering of ethnic minorities is far-reaching and profound, shaping lasting stereotypes that permeate popular culture and policy-making alike (Cameron and McCarthy 2015). Museums everywhere have a responsibility to reflect on their role in representing the archetypal 'Other', and the implications for empowering minority voices and promoting underrepresented perspectives on the world.

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Notes

- ¹ Pham Van Duong, Deputy Director, Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, personal communication, December 2017
- ² Pham Van Duong, Deputy Director, Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, personal communication, December 2017
- ³ Huynh Thi Anh Van, Director, Hue Royal Antiquities Museum, April 2018

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